Editorial

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The Medical Writer's Book Shelf

A Baker's Dozen of the Best Medical References

As a member of the Council of Scientific Editors, I am privileged to receive a host of print and web information on many interesting books, journals and the Internet.

In a recent issue of Science Editor,[1] Stephanie Deming, an Editor in the Department of Scientific Publications at the University of Texas in the Anderson Cancer Center, and Reviews Editor of Science Editor, compiled a list of favorite books and web sites of the Council of Medical Editors. I have summarized some of these recommendations.

In addition to the "baker's dozen," Deming reviewed "Scientific Writing – Easy When You Know How",[2] a comprehensive hard look that takes you through the steps in getting published in the biomedical field. It is "handy, readable and practical," written by a statistician, two academic pediatricians and a computer person with knowledge of access information.

This bibliography is important for every practicing physician, as well as clinical and basic scientists, and medical students. The reviews marked with an asterisk are available at the Hawaii Medical Library, and the Library staff can help you locate the others. As a serious bibliophile, I will be ordering the references I do not now have, and strongly recommend that you add some of these to your reference shelves.

Essentials of Writing Biomedical Research Papers. 2nd edition. (Mimi Zeiger. New York: McGraw-Hill; 2000. 440 pages. ISBN 0-07-134544-2.) This book provides a complete course in the art of writing clear, understandable biomedical papers. From word choice to sentence and paragraph structure through each section of the research paper, Zeiger offers discussion, examples, and exercises that will improve anyone's writing. The chapter on writing abstracts is particularly good. Anyone who systematically works through the book or reads even one chapter will come away with a better understanding of the process of writing biomedical research papers. – *Flo Witte*

The BBI Dictionary of English Word Combinations. Revised edition. (Morton Benson, Evelyn Benson, and Robert Ilson, compilers. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company; 1997. 386 pages. ISBN 1-55619-521-4.) If you have ever wondered whether the correct usage is "at risk for" or "at risk of," this book is for you. Common word arrangements are grouped around principal words (nouns, verbs, or adjectives) and include the prepositions that complete the groupings. For example, entries associated with the word *follow* explain the difference between *follow-up* and *follow up* and give sentence examples using the arrangements *follow-up on, follow-up to, follow up on,* and *follow up with.* The book's careful distinction between American usage and British usage (*in the future* or *in future*) is also helpful. This dictionary is a must for writers whose first language is not English, but it is also valuable *for* (or *to*!) native speakers who want to ensure that they are using standard English. – *Flo Witte* [The BBI is The Biomedical Business International, Inc., Ed]

References

1. Deming, S. The Science Editor's Book Sheet - Some Favorite Resources of CSE Members. Science Editor. Science Editor July-August 2003; 117-117.
2. Peat J et al. Scientific Writing: Easy When You Know How. London: BMJ Books: 2002. ISBN 0-7279-1625-4.

FLO WITTE is a program coordinator for the Office for Research and Leadership Development in the University of Kentucky College of Medicine.

Successful Scientific Writing: A Step-by-Step Guide for the Biological and Medical Sciences. 2nd edition. (Janice R. Matthews, John M. Bowen, and Robert W. Matthews. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2000. 230 pages. ISBN 0-521-78962-1.) This well-organized and readable book offers exactly what its subtitle suggests – a step-by-step guide, from conducting a literature search to constructing tables and graphs to systematically revising the first draft. Full of good advice, the also contains short exercises (with answers in the back) and cartoons that lighten and reinforce the message about good scientific writing. One of the best of the group of books on scientific writing that have appeared in recent years. – *Martha Tacker*

MARTHA TACKER, a former biochemist, now offers workshops and editorial services to help other researchers communicate their findings effectively and efficiently.

A Researcher's Guide to Scientific and Medical Illustrations. (Mary Helen Briscoe. New York: Springer-Verlag; 1990. 209 pages. ISBN 0-387-97199-8.) Some authors think of preparing illustrations as "extra," not integral, in an article or presentation. Almost every possibility of scientific illustration is included. "Best practices" of labeling, font choice, use of color, and layout are described in detail. For example, Briscoe compares two figures to show how a line graph becomes easier to read when it has consistent units of measure. Another example compares a table used in a journal article and the same data used in table form for an oral presentation. The guide's treatment of basics makes it a perfect starting point for authors, educators, and students. One shortfall: in the last 12 years, computers have become essential in preparing illustrations, but this guide describes only the fundamentals of preparing illustrations electronically, such as the need to change some default settings and the continued usefulness of scissors and tape. – *James Lee Griner*

JAMES LEE GRINER reviews dissertations, university documents, and funding applications at the University of Alabama at Birmingham Graduate School.

How to Report Statistics in Medicine: Annotated Guidelines for Authors, Editors, and Reviewers. (Thomas A. Lang and Michelle Secic. Philadelphia: American College of Physicians; 1997. 376 pages. ISBN 0-943126-44-4.) A complete set of guidelines for reporting, evaluating, and interpreting biostatistical analyses in the medical literature. Intended for non-statisticians, the book requires no knowledge of statistics and explains the meaning and importance of each guideline. Includes a comprehensive glossary and reference list for each guideline. Well written, with good examples. – *Tom Lang*

TOM LANG is a consultant in scientific publications and teaches critical appraisal of the biomedical literature, interpreting and reporting biostatistics, and written communication.

The Careful Writer: A Modern Guide to English Usage. (Thomas M. Bernstein. New York: Atheneum; 1977. 487 pages. ISBN 0-689-70555-7.) Bernstein explains the finer points of the English language in a way that anyone can understand. As opposed to typical grammar books, this book is organized in a glossary of "problem" words presented in alphabetical order. Entries include everything from *based on* to words and their correct prepositions to the correct use of *via*. This book is still current, it's comprehensive, and it's not pretentious. – *Diane Berneath Lang*

DIANE BERNEATH LANG is the assistant director of publications for editorial services for the Radiological Society of North America.

Medical Journalism: Exposing Fact, Fiction, Fraud. (Ragnar Levi. Ames: Iowa State University Press; 2001. 212 pages. ISBN 0-8138-0303-9.) This book takes a critical look at media coverage of medical research, and it gives reporters some basic tools for evaluating research themselves. It stresses the importance of evidence-based medicine and identifies common pitfalls in the evaluation of research. Although the book is perhaps best suited as a text for discussion in a classroom, its lessons are important and should be revisited often. – *Katherine Arnold*

KATHERINE ARNOLD is the news editor at the Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

American Medical Association Manual of Style: A Guide for Authors and Editors. 9th edition. (Cheryl Iverson, Annette Flanagin, Phil B. Fontanarosa, Richard M. Glass, Paula Glitman, Jane C. Lantz, Harriet S. Meyer, Jeanette M. Smith, Margaret A. Winker, and Roxanne K. Young. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins; 1998. xi + 660 pages. ISBN 0-683-40206-4.) This manual is an excellent guide to the preparation and publication of medical-journal articles. The chapters on ethical and legal considerations and on editorial assessment and processing provide a helpful overview of proper procedures for medical-journal editorial offices. Other sections that are especially valuable are

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those on formatting of figures and tables, correct and preferred medical usage, and nomenclature. No medical editor should be without this guide. – *Stephanie Deming*

International Congress on Peer Review in Biomedical Publication. (*www.jama-peer.org.*) This web site contains the program and abstracts from the fourth (most recent) International Congress on Peer Review in Biomedical Publication, held in September 2001; the program and abstracts from the third congress; and the complete contents of the three special issues of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* containing abstracts and articles from the second, third, and fourth congresses. – *Stephanie Deming*

STEPHANIE DEMING is an editor in the Department of Scientific Publications at the University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center and Reviews editor of Science Editor.

Peer Review in Health Sciences. (Fiona Godlee and Tom Jefferson, editors. London: BMJ Books; 1999. 286 pages. ISBN 0-7279-1181-3.) *Peer Review in the Health Sciences* is a first-rate examination of all aspects of peer review, written by 28 experienced editors and specialists from around the world and incorporating the latest research. Part 1 covers concepts and issues – such as develop ment of peer review, effectiveness, and misconduct – and peer review in non-English and small journals, and peer review for grant applications and the pharmaceutical industry. Part 2 is a "how to" section, with such topics as setting up a peer-review system, how to review, and statistical review. Part 3 is about the future of peer review. The book's tone is scholarly, except for a lighthearted chapter that presents a conversation between Socrates and a journal editor who asks the great man for advice about peer review. – *Addeane Caelleigh*

ADDEANE CAELLEIGH is a consultant to faculty and professional groups on academic writing and publishing. She is the former editor of Academic Medicine.

NCBI's Citation Matcher for Single Articles. (*www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query/static/citmatch.html.*) This is a trusted favorite among my reference materials. NCBI is the National Center for Biotechnology Information of the National Library of Medicine. Are you working on a list of citations in which a page number is missing? Does your document list three authors before "et al" when your style manual calls for five? Do you want to know the proper abbreviation for a scientific journal? At NCBI's *Citation Matcher*, you plug in as much information as you have about a citation, and it provides the rest. Even the author's last name and a page number can be enough to go on. Clicking on the citation brings up the article abstract. From there, you can follow links to related articles and books, and often to the complete article. – *Elaine A. Richman*

ELAINE A. RICHMAN writes and edits materials about science. She is a member of the editorial board of Science Editor *and founder of EAR Medical Communications of Baltimore, Maryland.*

Journal Publishing. (Gillian Page, Robert Campbell, and Jack Meadows. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press; 1997. 419 pages. ISBN 0-521-44157-4.) This is the only book I'm aware of that's devoted solely to the process of publishing scholarly journals. It is an essential addition to the personal library of any student or professional involved in the development, production, promotion, and distribution of what is known as the primary–archival–literature of the profes sions, scholarship, science, technology, and medicine. The authors' stated aim is "to cover all major aspects of the subject, discussing commonly occurring problems, and...answer(ing) the most frequently asked questions." The table of contents bears this out as Page, Campbell, and Meadows pack the 11 chapters with much pertinent and useful information. They start with 1, "Introduction to Journals;" 2. "Editing;" 3. "Production;" 4. "Marketing;" 5. "Subscription Management and Distribution;" and 6. "Non-subscription Revenue." Having covered the mechanics, they move on to 7. "Legal and Ethical Aspects;" 8. "Financial Aspects;" 9. "Bibliographic Aspects." They finish with the practical 10. "Managing a List of Journals and the Future;" and 11. "Electronic Publishing." Both appendixes are useful, as are the glossary, bibliography, and index. – *Barbara Meyers*

BARBARA MEYERS is president, Meyers Consulting Services, in Adelphi, Maryland, and provides expert advice and operational expertise to scholarly publishers and professional societies. She is one of the founders of the Society for Scholarly Publishing and a past president of CSE.

Professional and Scholarly Publishing in the Digital Age. (Czeslaw Jan Grycz, editor. Developed and written by the members of the Association of American Publishers Professional and Scholarly Publishing Division's Electronic Information Committee. New York: Association of American Publishers, Inc; 1997. 144 pages. ISBN 0-933-63634-2.) In the preface, Grycz presents two critical questions: "For whom was this paper written?" "What does this paper intend to address/accomplish?" His answer to the first is "pro-

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